DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 193 002 RC 012 307

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TITLE The Delivery of Educational Services: The Small District Problem. A Review of the Literature.
PUB DATE 8 Feb 80
NOTE 56p.; Paper presented to the faculty of the Department of Educational Administration, University of Texas at Austin in partial fulfillment of the requirements for admission to candidacy.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Consolidated Schools; Curriculum Development; *Delivery Systems; *Educational Improvement; *Educational Quality; Education Service Centers; Elementary Secondary Education; *Rural Education; *Rural Schools; Shared Services; *Small Schools; Special Education; Teacher Education; Teacher Effectiveness; Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

Within the existing framework of public education in rural and small schools, educational leaders must always seek new ways for achieving substantive improvements in the delivery of educational services to their students. Although much of the official concern for rural/small schools has been directed toward consolidation and urbanization, small school leaders are showing an adeptness for identifying and implementing promising alternatives for educational improvement. The voluntary sharing of services, staff, and equipment demonstrates enormous potential. Although the problems are numerous, the opportunities for quality education in rural/small schools can be found in local resourcefulness, creativity, external assistance, cooperation and a willingness to provide the best possible educational program. The review of literature in this document is directed toward finding ways to improve the curriculum teaching quality, and overall quality of rural/small schools. Items included for review are: strengths and weaknesses of the school systems, teachers' problems, teacher training, vocational education, services for the handicapped and other disadvantaged students, educational aspirations and achievements of rural students, and opportunities for innovations and improvements in the delivery system. (Author/AN)

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A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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by

Johnny L. Veselka

February 8, 1980

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THE DELIVERY OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES: THE SMALL DISTRICT PROBLEM

PART I. SMALL DISTRICTS IN THE DELIVERY SYSTEM: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THEIR PREVALENCE

The effective delivery of educational services to students enrolled in more than 15,000 public school districts throughout the United States and the quality of the instructional programs in these districts are issues that have recently drawn substantial attention. The problems associated with providing adequate educational programs may be most perplexing, however, to the administrators of the nation's rural and small school districts. "Rural schools have historically shared several common problems . . . . recruiting highly competent teachers and administrators, providing special education and other specialized services, securing needed capital and operating funds, and compensating for the inherent isolation and population sparsity of rural areas." These problems have persisted through the years and generally remain unsolved today (Sher 1977: 16).

Small Schools Research Efforts

The research on small school problems is relatively limited. Most of the available literature is devoted to the defects and disadvantages of small schools, to consolidation efforts and to the discussion of their inefficiency and diseconomies of scale. Many statistical and analytic research reports exclude districts with fewer than 300 students from their data. In fact, it has been stated that much of the uniqueness of rural schools defies quantitative or statistical analysis. Certainly,

"the slower pace and less pressured environment, the spirit of cooperation, the opportunities for leadership development, the less formal interactions among students, staff, and parents, and other similar qualities . . . are not easily measured by the tools of educational research" (Sher 1977: 19).

There has been no Office of Rural Education in the U. S. Office of Education or in the majority of state education agencies. Only Oregon and Texas, at the state level, have initiated a formal effort "to marshal state resources (human and financial) in support of locally determined rural school improvement programs" (Sher 1978: 34). The National Center for Education Statistics does not publish information on rural schools. The most prolific source of information on this subject is the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools which has been established at New Mexico State University.

Although recent legislation creating the Department of Education did provide for an office of rural education, it was placed under the jurisdiction of the Assistant Secretary for Vocational and Adult Education. That office has been given responsibility for providing a unified approach to "rural family education."

In spite of official neglect, current prospects for an expanded focus on rural education are promising. In May 1979, the first National Seminar on Rural Education was held at the University of Maryland. This seminar, jointly sponsored by the U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and the U. S. Department of Agriculture, produced a long list of recommendations outlining a national strategy to improve rural education.

A number of regional projects have emerged in the past two decades throughout the country to serve the needs of small schools. These include the Catskill Area Project; the Rocky Mountain Area Project; and the Upper Midwest, Western States, Oregon, Texas, and Southern States Small Schools Projects. The Experimental Schools Program, federally financed and administered by the National Institute of Education, has encouraged innovation and productive change in small districts. Two of the regional educational laboratories have concerned themselves with small school and rural education issues: the Appalachian Educational Laboratory and the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the National School Boards Association (NSBA) are currently involved in a federally-funded project to establish a network for small school districts. As part of this effort, a national meeting of small districts is expected to be convened during 1980 and one of the project's objectives is to establish a "forum where small school districts can exchange ideas, identify goals and plan mutually beneficial action" (AASA 1980: 2).

A Definition for "Small" and "Rural"

There is much ambiguity about what constitutes "small" and "rural," and differences of opinion about whether a small school in a metropolitan area faces the same problems as those faced by small rural schools. There is consensus, however, that "a school which is not large enough to provide a program for the majority of its students constitutes a 'small' school" (Edington 1976: 4). Edington notes also that the North Central Association classifies small high schools as those with 300 or fewer students.

"Small school" may be defined as any elementary school with no more than one classroom per grade level or a total attendance of 180 pupils and any high school with a graduating class of fewer than 100 students. "Rural" has been defined as "the open countryside and all non-metropolitan places having a total population of fewer than ten thousand residents" (Tompkins 1976: 31). Edward D. Moe and Lewis R. Tamblyn suggest that in any discussion of school characteristics, the population should be divided into two primary groups: metropolitan and non-metropolitan. They define "non-metropolitan" to include places located outside of counties which contain a city of 50,000 or more residents (Moe 1974: 49). Depending on the definition used by the U. S. Bureau of the Census, "rural education" is provided by more than 39,000 schools distributed among nearly 12,000 local school districts throughout the United States (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1973: Table 2). In Texas, districts with fewer than 1,000 students in average daily attendance are generally classified as "small," and receive special consideration in the distribution of state aid under the Foundation School Program. Due to the lack of clarity about the definitions of "rural" and "small," these terms are used interchargeably in this discussion of the small district problem.

Since 1970, rural America's population base has experienced considerable resurgence. One of the country's leading demographers, Calvin Beale, observed:

> The vast rural-to-urban migration of people that was the common pattern of U. S. population movement in the decades after World War II has been halted and, on balance, even reversed. During 1970-73, non-metropolitan areas gained 4.2 percent in population compared to only 2.9 percent for metro areas (Beale 1975: 3).

This reversal in the dominant trend of rural-to-urban migration will have significant implications for these small rural schools in the years ahead. The net flow of people to the South and West and to rural areas and smaller metropolitan communities is expected to continue throughout the 1980's (Ross 1979: 1-14). Thus, for the foreseeable future, rural America's existence as both a significant segment of the national population and as a vital sector of the nation's educational system seems assured on the basis of these demographic changes. These developments will serve as a catalyst for rapid social change in rural communities and particularly for rural school systems and rural educators should expect to be confronted, not only with increases in their student population, but also with new ideas, expectations, and values (Ross 1979: 17).

The Beginnings of Consolidation

Historically, small districts have had a prominent place, numerically, in the delivery of public education in the United States. Being a predominantly rural nation for a century or more, schools were established in thousands of small communities and isolated rural areas to provide educational opportunities to children. Shortly after 1900, when the population had shifted, efforts toward reorganization and consolidation of these small public schools began in many states. The report of the Committee of Twelve on Rural Schools of the National Education Association (1895), "as much as any other report . . . helped establish the present system of schools: centralized, standardized, and professionally administered" (Rosenfeld 1977: 21).

In 1914, Ellwood Cubberley wrote that rural education was "lacking in effective supervision, controlled largely by rural people, who, too often, do not realize either their own needs or the possibilities of rural education, and taught by teachers who, generally speaking, have but little comprehension of the rural-life problems" (Cubberley 1914: 105-106). By this time education had become compulsory in most states and was recognized as a legitimate state responsibility. And, by the late 1940's, a nearly uniform public education system was created throughout the country due to "state requirements for course offerings, teacher certification, building specifications and financial aid, coupled with the standardization of achievement tests, teacher training programs, and curriculum packages" (Rosenfeld 1977: 38).

The Effects of School Consolidation

The school consolidation movement, characterized by Jonathan Sher and Rachel Tompkins as the "most successfully implemented educational policy of the past fifty years," altered the structural composition of America's public school systems substantially (Sher 1976: 1). Other modern critics have contended that the efforts of rural school reformers were devoted to "achieving massive structural reform without seriously considering ways to improve the overall quality of education in rural America" (Sher 1977a: 283). Many educators viewed consolidation as a "panacea," and large new rural schools and school districts became a "tangible and effective symbol of the modernization which increasingly permeated all aspects of rural life in America." The benefits of consolidation such as new buildings, more courses, and

equipment, overshadowed the "values of smallness--local control, the close relations possible among professionals, parents, students, and community, and the opportunity for many more students to participate in school activities at a more meaningful level" (Tompkins 1976: 2).

On the other hand, supporters of the consolidation movement argued that consolidation would lead to "better supervision, age-graded schools, specialized teachers, broader curricula, increased professionalism, and expanded resources." Consolidation proponents also argued that students would benefit from better facilities for such subjects as science and music, would have an opportunity to participate in better and more varied extracurricular activities, could experience wider social opportunities, and would attend school more regularly as a result of being transported from door to school. They also suggested that consolidation would reduce educational expenditures and create closer ties with neighboring communities (Barker and Gump 1964: 139). Others, including Ellwood Cubberley, suggested that consolidation and centralization were necessary to keep control of the schools away from the recent immigrants to America (Rosenfeld 1977: 25).

Anti-consolidation educators characterized the alleged benefits of consolidation as "illusory." They said that students would lose contact with local teachers who knew the community and their families, would spend time being transported to and from school which could be devoted with more profit to other activities, and would have less opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities. They claimed also that parents would lose control of their schools and experience a breakdown in community cohesion and participation (Barker 1964: 139).

Children, in some cases, were forced to travel long distances to attend schools which were "no better than the community schools they replaced" (Rosenfeld 1977: 32).

Lewis Tamblyn contends that "reorganized school districts and consolidated schools, with the help of fleets of school buses" have made a high school education accessible to many youths otherwise unable to get such education, which now includes "more diversified program offerings, a larger quantity of up-to-date instructional materials, laboratories and libraries, as well as better utilization of professional staff" (Tamblyn 1971: 10). David Tyack concludes that the modernization of rural schooling through consolidation resulted in "better school buildings, a broader and more contemporary course of studies, and better qualified teachers and administrators . . . and gave country youth greater occupational mobility and introduced them to different lifestyles" (Tyack 1974: 25). Most inadequate rural schools have been closed and consolidation has resulted, occasionally, in some cost savings and increased efficiency. Others who conclude that school consolidation and reorganization led to significant educational improvements, cite establishment of minimum standards, provision of more adequate resources, and elimination of inadequate facilities. Some of these opine, however, that the reform was so heavily reliant on organizational and structural changes that substantive improvements were often delayed or overlooked (Rosenfeld 1977: 40-42).

In spite of massive consolidation between 1935 and 1965, in 1967 Edgar L. Morphet, Roe L. Johns, and Theodore Reller wrote, "more than three-fourths of all existing districts are too small to be effective, . . .

every study that has been made shows that these districts are costly to operate and most provide inadequate programs" (Morphet 1967: 273). Their recommendation was for still more consolidation of small districts.

Structural Changes in the Delivery System

In 1930, there were 128,000 school districts in the United States. By 1950 the number was reduced to 84,000. Between 1950 and 1970 the total was reduced by approximately one-half during each decade, so that by 1970 there were fewer than 18,000 districts remaining (Tompkins 1976: 1). In 1979, Martin Burlingame wrote that improvement of quality in existing small districts went begging because "the prevailing theme of rural and small school policymaking has been, and remains, the continuous confrontation of these districts with efforts to consolidate them into larger districts" (Burlingame 1979: 313).

In 1977-78 there were 15,834 operating public school systems in the United States. Over 53 percent of these districts (8,483) enrolled fewer than 1,000 students, 42 percent (6,619) enrolled fewer than 600 students, and 27 percent had a student enrollment of fewer than 300 (National Center for Education Statistics 1979: 78). Likewise, in Texas small districts continue to constitute a substantial portion of the state's 1072 school districts. In 1978-79, 685 school districts, or 64 percent of the total had fewer than 1,000 students in average daily attendance (ADA). Seventy-three percent of the Texas districts reported fewer than 1,500 ADA.

Since the massive consolidation that occurred in the 1950's and 1960's is no longer taking place, small districts will obviously perform a key function in the educational process for many years to come. Attention,

according to Jonathan P. Sher, must be directed toward substantive reforms--finding ways to improve the curriculum, the quality of the teaching staff, and the overall quality of these schools (Sher 1977a: 283-290). Such substantive changes must be considered in the context of the problems and promises that face small district policy makers and educators, responses that have been developed in the past, and solutions that might emerge in the future. Toward that end the remainder of this literature review is directed.

PART II. CONSTRAINTS UPON THE DELIVERY OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION: THE PROBLEMS FOR SMALL DISTRICTS

The foremost challenge for rural education is to "drastically improve the quality of its educational offerings" so that the curriculum will become relevant, not only for those who will remain in the community, but also for those who will move to urban areas (Tamblyn 1971: 16). In a report prepared for the National Conference of State Legislatures, Jonathan P. Sher suggested that "the central question facing rural education today (and probably well into the future) remains largely unanswered--that is, what is the nature and content of a distinctively rural education?" (Sher 1978: 32).

For many years, educators have presumed that what was right for urban-suburban schools was also right for the small rural school. In this context, rural educators have attempted to imitate their metropolitan counterparts by imposing large school solutions on small school problems. According to Jonathan Sher, "'better' has too often meant 'more like metropolitan schools' instead of 'better' in meeting the needs of rural children" (Sher 1978: 32). Cheryl Chase postulates that this experience has caused the development of "a new sensitivity to the nature and potential of the small rural school" (Chase 1978: 1).

In Schooling in Isolated Communities (1978), Tom Gjelten acknowledged that:

> As long as rural schools emulate an urban model of education, rely on curriculum materials written for urban children, and seek to hire the same kind of teachers as urban schools seek, they probably will be second-rate . . . . Rural schools' curricula are not fated to be inferior, as long as they take advantage of the rich resources of the rural community and relate directly to the experience of rural children (Sher 1978: 32-33).

Generally, such a curriculum would incorporate six major features according to Gjelten:

(1) A strong foundation in the teaching of basic skills and essential facts.

(2) An emphasis on practical skills and learning by doing.

(3) Training in self-directed study and the development of initiative.

(4) A focus on the local rural community.

(5) A commitment to familiarizing students with the outside world.

(6) An emphasis on the options available to rural youths both within and beyond the local community (Sher 1978: 33).

In a paper prepared for the House and Senate Education Committees of the Iowa Legislature, James D. Jess asserted that "so much emphasis is directed in the curriculums of Iowa's small rural schools toward preparing their students to leave their local communities that few graduates have learned the value of returning to their local communities to help them grow and develop" (Jess 1979: 15).

Since rural schools in sparsely populated areas are generally much smaller than schools in urban and suburban areas, they encounter great difficulty in providing necessary services and equipment for limited enrollments. In addition, there is usually a scarcity of financial resources for obtaining qualified teachers, adequate and appropriate educational materials, sufficiently diversified curricula, and the special services needed to meet individual needs. The lack of educational opportunity in rural and small schools is often interpreted in terms of these shortcomings (Sher 1977: 51).

Numerous writers advance the proposition that a comprehensive curriculum has not been furnished to students in rural schools and that an overemphasis has been devoted to college preparation. Gordon Swanson states that the imposition of a college-oriented curriculum on rural students has forced many rural youth to move from their local areas to obtain vocational-technical training or a job (Swanson 1970: 2). B. Eugene Griessman criticizes the teachers and counselors in these schools for encouraging promising students to pursue college preparation programs rather than exploring vocationally-oriented opportunities (Griessman 1969: 22). The high dropout rate among rural youth, says M. L. Cushman, can be attributed to a high school curriculum "geared first toward the academic preparation for entering college and only secondarily toward the preparation for an occupation or for the subsequent vocational training that might lead to successful entrance into an occupation (Cushman 1967: 4).

In his study of the American high school, published in 1959, James B. Conant charged that small high schools with fewer than 100 graduating seniors could not offer a comprehensive educational program. He emphasized that in most school settings no more than "25 percent of a high school class can study with profit twelfth-grade mathematics, physics, and a foreign language for four years . . . . If a school has a twelfth grade of only forty and indeed only a quarter of the group can handle the advanced subjects effectively, instruction in mathematics, science, and foreign languages would have to be provided for a maximum of ten students" (Conant 1959: 37). To the contrary, Rachel Tompkins contends that, even among the schools included in the Conant study,

there were small schools that met the criteria for comprehensiveness. She concluded that the report merely substantiates the reality of great variation among schools, regardless of size (Tompkins 1976: 15).

It is evident that small high schools have difficulty providing a curriculum with sufficient depth and breadth to guarantee adequate educational opportunities for all rural youth. In a 1976 survey conducted by the National Federation for the Improvement of Rural Education (NFIRE), rural educators ranked "the limited course offerings for students, especially at the secondary level" as their most prominent concern. A closely associated problem, the limited availability of special services (music, library, programs for the handicapped, art, PE, and health) was listed third behind their concern for the deficiency in financial support for rural education (Jongeward 1977: 3-7). In a 1973 survey, over 360 teachers and administrators in 45 small West Texas school districts ranked "limited curriculum and course offerings" as the worst feature of small schools. The item was mentioned 112 times; the second most frequently mentioned concern was listed only 30 times (Mehaffie 1973: 2-3).

Student Achievement in Small Schools

The results of national assessment programs show that rural school children consistently rank lower than their metropolitan counterparts on most standardized achievement tests. This can be substantiated, for example, by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Sher 1977: 17). The results of the Texas Assessment Project (TAP) conducted during the 1977-78 and 1978-79 school years, likewise, revealed that students in rural Texas perform "less well than their suburban counterparts in

the areas of reading, writing (composition), mathematics, citizenship, and career education (Texas Education Agency 1980: 7).

On the basis of such results, George Henderson recommends that school districts must establish "skill laboratories" in which students can observe the need for learning specific skills and that teachers must place more emphasis on encouraging students to use and develop speaking, reading, and writing abilities (Henderson 1973: 40).

Everett Edington also notes this deficiency among rural students on a national scale and suggests that it might be due to school size, environmental influence, or organizational structure (Edington 1976: 8). Although his contentions have been widely disputed, James B. Conant has also claimed that school achievement is directly related to certain key resources, including "high per pupil expenditures, advanced curricular offerings, faculty salaries, experience and credentials, new equipment and facilities, and the number of books in the school library." These suggestions have been questioned by such writers as James Coleman, Christopher Jencks, and Donald M. Levine. Their assessment has been that most of these resources are poor explanatory variables for school achievement. Even those, such as Charles Silberman, who have demonstrated confidence in the ultimate value of better resources, are convinced that "the critical factor is the manner, purpose and competence with which whatever resources possessed are utilized" (Tompkins 1976: 16-17).

The School Size Controversy

The test score debate has also generated considerable discussion about the impact of school size on the delivery of educational services. In a study of rural/sparse program quality, Fred White and Luther

Tweeten suggested that a "minimally adequate" program could not be offered in a school of fewer than 550 ADA (average daily attendance) and that 900 ADA were necessary before a "desirable" program could be offered. They defined a minimally adequate high school program as "38 academic units/course offerings at the high school level with no vocational offerings" and a desirable program as one which offers "38 academic units/course offerings and 8 vocational offerings" (White and Tweeten 1973: 47-52).

Some authorities suggest that curricular offerings should be three times larger than a school's graduation requirements in order to be adequate (Truesdell 1969: 15). If this principle were applied to Texas' 18 units of credit required for high school graduation, an "adequate" curriculum would include 54 course offerings. Another indicator of adequacy advanced by Cushman is that "in general, adequate districts are those that have 40 teachers or more" (Cushman 1967: 6).

In 1968, the Governor's Committee on Public School Education proposed a reorganization of Texas school districts so that no 12-grade operating district would have fewer than 2,600 students in average daily attendance. The Committee's report claimed that such districts, with approximately 800 students in high school, could offer a balanced academic and vocational program with electives to match the state's educational goals. The report also noted that teachers in such schools could specialize in their respective subject areas, 50-55 courses could be offered and no teacher would have to plan more than two different lessons per day (Governor's Committee 1968: 24-25).

Roe L. Johns' study of Florida school districts revealed "clearly that unequal educational programs are associated with sparsity of pupil

population. By analyzing the number of units of instruction in a school, he evaluated the educational opportunities available to students. Each "unit of instruction" represented the number of different subjects available by grade levels and calculations were made for total units per grade, exceptional (special) education programs, and number of vocational courses available in each school center. As the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) pupils decreased, the number of different units also decreased in each area. He cites statistics which reveal that students in grades 10-12 in Florida's five most heavily populated counties had access to more than 138 different units per grade. Students in the five most sparsely populated counties had access to fewer than 75 units, with 40 units being the smallest. The number of vocational course offerings ranged from 211 to 1,086 in the 11 most populous counties and from 14 to 73 in the 26 counties with the fewest full-time-equivalent pupils (Johns 1975: 171-177).

Teachers in Rural and Small Schools

The "plight of teaching" is discussed at length in the literature on educational quality in rural and small schools. Associated with this problem are a multiplicity of issues such as the lack of instructional resources, low salaries, isolationism, and other difficulties inherent in attracting and retaining qualified personnel. One clear indicator of the general disregard for rural teachers is that no one bothers to collect and analyze data on them. Neither the federal government, the National Education Association, nor the American Federation of Teachers has produced a major report on rural teachers in nearly two

decades. Yet, one of every three public school teachers is employed outside a designated metropolitan area (Sher 1977: 78).

The need for excellent teachers is most prominent in rural areas because

> rural districts normally employ far fewer specialized support staff members (e.g., curriculum coordinators, career counselors, media specialists, and school psychologists) . . . . and most rural communities lack a variety of educational and cultural institutions existing outside the school system (Sher 1977: 75).

J. Alan Thomas suggests that rural teachers face "some of the most complex responsibilities found in the entire educational system." They teach a variety of subjects to diverse student populations and often must deal in the same classroom with the complex educational, social, and personal problems of handicapped, gifted, and economically disadvantaged students (Thomas 1974: 8).

Many small school districts, according to Nolan Estes, are simply unable to support the kind of staff required in today's public schools. The likelihood of multiple preparations coupled with "the high mobility of the best trained teachers and administrators creates dual problems of imposing proportions: Insufficient money to hire the variety of trained teachers needed and relatively low salary scales which are unattractive to the most able and well trained" (Estes 1967: 3). Ivan Muse agrees that lower salaries, inadequate physical facilities, and other rural inconveniences are viewed as disadvantages by teachers who have lived in an urban area and taught in a large, well-equipped urban or suburban school (Muse 1977: 16).

Most rural teachers enter the classroom with little preparation for meeting the unique needs of rural children and, according to Faith Dunne,

"little systematic effort has been made to recruit the best people for rural schools, and even less effort has been made to train them properly" (Dunne 1977: 100). Ivan Muse concurs with this belief that teacher training institutions generally have not recognized the importance of rural education as an important component of teacher education (Muse 1977: 30).

For this reason, Martha Loustaunau expresses the need for strong inservice programs including supplemental workshops to help teachers identify and deal with these problems. She cites a 1969 project of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools which produced improvements in instructional skill, pupil interaction and teacher attitude following an opportunity in which rural teachers were able to observe, analyze and evaluate their own videotaped teaching behavior (Loustaunau 1975: 13).

Ivan Muse deplores the fact that preservice programs have always been largely campus and urban-based. Successful student teaching experiences in an urban or suburban school environment therefore have, in essence, encouraged graduates to seek teaching positions in similar settings. He expresses a concern that "the rural teacher cannot gain the necessary experience and skills unless teacher training institutions serve as active agents in promoting rural teacher education" (Muse 1977: 16-20). Providing better teachers for rural schools, however, may involve more than improving teacher preparation programs, declares George Henderson. Rural teaching must be made more attractive because these schools are used by many simply as a place "to gain a year or more of experience." Too many good teachers in rural systems are lured to the cities by promises of a brighter future and higher salaries (Henderson 1971: 171-173).

Measurements of Quality

The measurement of school district quality was defined by James D. Jess in terms of "student retention, student participation, graduate productivity, citizen satisfaction, and parent willingness to financially support schools." In his study of 18 randomly selected Iowa school districts, Jess enunciates the following characteristics of small districts:

> They had smaller pupil-teacher ratios; greater student retention rates; knew a greater percentage of their graduates' status; had greater levels of student satisfaction . . . had higher levels of parent satisfaction with the school and with opportunities for children in extracurricular activities; and had higher levels of parent willingness to vote for increased school taxes (Jess 1977: 169-172).

Robert E. Skenes and Carolyn Carlyle have also stated that educational quality in small rural schools is enhanced by the individual attention shown for students, the feeling that students, teachers, and administrators know each other, and the chance for all students to participate in many extra-curricular activies (Skenes 1979: 590). Although larger districts offer their students more course opportunities, pay their teachers higher salaries and experience lower per-pupil costs, James Jess refutes the contention that larger districts offer greater quality because they offer their students more courses. His findings, based on an assessment of 43 different factors related to program input and educational quality output, did not reveal a significant correlation between the greater number of units offered and the success of the schools' graduates (Jess 1977: 169-172).

Bikkar Randhawa also investigated the effect of locale, grade, and subject on instructional quality in 60 urban and 57 rural classrooms

and found that rural teachers provided a better quality of instruction than urban teachers. His conclusion was that "rural teachers provided more productive critical thinking type of information, asked more questions of their pupils and rejected fewer pupil utterances "while urban teachers spent significantly more time in disciplinary activity, adversely affecting cognitive and productive critical thinking tasks" (Randhawa 1977: 29-34).

However, in another study of 47 rural and 49 urban classrooms, Randhawa and Julian Michayluk found that urban classrooms had a better physical environment, were intellectually stimulating, and provided an environment in which students perceived their learning experiences as sufficiently satisfying (Randhawa 1975: 270-277).

Vocational Offerings in Small Schools

Even the best rural schools, because of their limited enrollments, have difficulty providing specialized services to their students. This is due largely to the high cost of programs, such as vocational education, and the relatively low incidence of students with similar interests or needs. However, like rural America as a whole, the quality of rural vocational education is so diverse that one can find evidence to support nearly any characterization of the vocational program opportunities afforded to rural youth. Jonathan Sher, in a report presented to the National Institute of Education as part of its study of vocational education, states that, as a whole, rural vocational education shares "both the constraints and the opportunities inherent in all public educational institutions in rural America" (Sher 1979: 259-260).

In many instances a student's vocational education opportunities are limited to either vocational agriculture or homemaking education. The typical curriculum is usually devoted to such subjects as production of farm crops and livestock, marketing of farm products, farm business management, soil management, and improved citizenship and rural leadership (Griessman 1969: 18). And, while vocational agriculture is the only pre-employment course available in many rural high schools, Grant Venn called it "paradoxical" that agricultural enrollments increased by eight percent "in the face of the loss of 3 million agricultural jobs between 1947 and 1962" (Venn 1964: 74-75). Even more recently, rural vocational education has been characterized as irrelevant. Agriculture is still emphasized even though "it is no longer a realistic vocational goal for most" (Sher 1977: 59).

According to Sher and Rosenfeld, a 1974 study revealed that only one-third of these agricultural program graduates could reasonably expect a farming job. Yet, they were still producing thousands of "future farmers" several years later (Sher 1977: 59). Further evidence indicates that rural and non-metropolitan vocational students usually take courses in agriculture and home economics rather than health, office/business, distributive education, or technical education (Fratoe 1978: 21).

Rosenfeld declares that "vocational agriculture is no longer the dominant force it once was (a little more than one million students or 6.9 percent were enrolled in 1977), yet it continues to have a fundamental place in many rural schools, offering programs in horticulture, dairy herd management, agribusiness operations, forestry, renewable natural resources, and agricultural mechanics. Consumer and homemaking education,

the largest of the vocational programs, is designed to prepare both males and females for the dual role of homemakers and wage-earners, offering such topics as family living, consumer education, and child development (Rosenfeld 1979: 21).

Lewis Tamblyn reports that the President's Committee on Vocational Education (1963) found industrial and distributive courses to be almost non-existent in rural schools. He also cited statistics showing that approximately 70 percent of the enrollment in vocational agriculture was in production agriculture courses, although employment opportunities for 1975 were projected to be down 22 percent from the 4.1 million in 1965 (Tamblyn 1971: 17).

Rural sociologist William Kuvlevsky calls for changes in "the tendency to maintain vocational agriculture as the most important vocational program for adolescent boys in rural, particularly agricultural, areas." He also calls for a reappraisal of the low priority which has been given in the past to comprehensive guidance programs, including career counseling and job placement (Kuvlevsky 1973: 339). Concern for this predicament is reiterated by Jonathan Sher who charges that emphasis on a particular kind of training "because that is where the jobs used to be, or simply because that training 'has always been offered,' does a serious injustice to rural students" (Sher 1979: 271).

Sher identifies three sparsity-related problems intrinsically related to the delivery of vocational education services in rural areas: lack of access; diseconomies; and the absence of supporting institutions, such as postsecondary schools, state and federal youth training and employment programs, and private vocational education efforts. In addition, he

attributes the "overall poor quality of rural vocational education" to outdated and irrelevant programming, migration orientation, job-specific programs, and lack of work experience opportunities. Of these problems, he characterizes the financial diseconomies of rural vocational education as its greatest obstacle. While vocational education is expensive everywhere, "in rural areas, the general problems of low enrollment and low-per-pupil wealth combine to make urban-style comprehensive vocational education programs financially inaccessible. And, as energy costs rise, the most common solution--busing students to regional centers--may become prohibitive" (Sher 1979: 268-274).

Although rural vocational programs are often limited in diversity and the course coverage is generally superficial, Jonathan Sher says that "the majority of America's rural high school students do have access to some type of vocational education experience" (Sher 1978: 33). On the other hand, Sher concludes that poor vocational education programs in rural schools are "not simply the result of poor planning, poor program design, or poor implementation (though there has been a substantial amount of each)." Instead, they are due to "a pervasive unwillingness, or inability, to confront the necessity of directly creating jobs as well as job applicants." Yet, he says, we must remember that rural educators are faced with a lack of human and financial resources and, many times, must provide a far narrower range of training than they know is desirable (Sher 1979: 268-274).

Services for Handicapped Children

The delivery of special education programs to handicapped children poses another unique problem for school districts with small student

populations, particularly in isolated areas. They must pursue instructional and organizational strategies that, at times, are difficult to justify economically. Harold W. Heller points out that the rural handicapped child, having both a handicap and a low expectation for obtaining appropriate educational services, is doubly disadvantaged (Heller 1975: 137).

Leonard Burrello and Daniel Sage, in describing the rural district problem, identify the chief determinant of alternative programs as "the severity of need for specialized services or the intensity of services required." These are generally limited to residential facility placements, extraordinary transportation or communication mechanisms, or itinerant consultant services. The predicament for rural educators involves

(1) identifying available alternatives for service,

(2) innovating beyond ordinarily existing alternatives,

(3) evaluating trade-offs between equivocal alternatives, or

(4) making decisions between alternatives, neither of which can be considered optimal, but hopefully may suffice (Burrello 1979: 141).

Among the challenges for rural educators, perceived by Harold Heller, are the delivery of services to small numbers of handicapped children scattered over a wide geographic area, lack of financial support for the expensive programs required by the handicapped, the transitional nature of rural society which reduces the "community-unity of purpose" necessary to establish programs for the handicapped, and the inability to attract and retain quality personnel (Heller 1975: 137-141). Burrello and Sage also conclude that the delivery of special education services to these

students requires a different cost-benefit scale than for regular programs, utilizing such solutions as "esoteric transportation schemes, unusual communication mechanisms, residential placements, or deployment of personnel into different kinds of roles" (Burrello 1979: 146).

An interim study committee on special education recently reported to the Texas Legislature that delivery mechanisms for services to handicapped children must be sensitive to the needs of rural districts "often covering large, sparsely populated areas and having special needs in regard to transportation, provision of facilities and equipment for the severely handicapped, and availability of highly specialized instructional and related service personnel." The Texas study recognized that urban districts, with heavy concentrations of specific disabilities seek specialist teachers, while rural areas and small districts have "indicated a need to prepare special educators who have general knowledge of all handicapping conditions," in order to serve children with different handicaps who are pooled into one class (Interim Study Committee 1979: 59-62).

Burrello and Sage agree that the individuals responsible for special education programs in rural areas normally are more concerned with broad general knowledge of alternatives rather than specific technical skill. They note also that such persons usually have other responsibilities as well and cannot be concerned solely with special education issues (Burrello 1979: 141-142).

Services for Disadvantaged Children

The National Advisory Council on the Education of Disadvantaged Children (NACEDC) recently issued a special report on Rural Education which directs its attention to the effectiveness of federal programs serving low

income and educationally disadvantaged children. The report observed that excessive application and administrative reporting requirements are a severe burden on small districts and their limited staffs. After visiting rural state and federally funded programs in nine states and conducting a series of informal hearings, the Council concluded that education in rural areas "becomes more than a process of providing the proper classroom setting, opportunities for learning basic skills and guidance towards desired educational objectives." Rather, it involves "a total concept of funding, planning, establishing adequate institutions, procurement of facilities and costly materials and an effective educational service delivery mechanism" (NACEDC 1979: 15-17).

Educational Aspirations of Rural Students

On the premise that graduates of small rural school districts differ from the graduates of metropolitan districts in terms of talents, preparation, and options, a study by Abt Associates assessed the status of recent high school graduates. The nine rural districts selected for participation in the study had been involved for several years in the Experimental Schools Program, an innovative educational program funded by the National Institute of Education. Geographically, they were scattered throughout the country. The study compared the values, aspirations, postgraduate activities, self-concepts, and plans of rural graduates with those of urban, suburban, and small town high school graduates. The researchers found remarkably similar characteristics among all of the groups. Their conclusion was that "rurality" may not exist as a "distinguishing characteristic" of high school seniors, despite the documentation of differences between rural and urban school settings (Abt, 1977).

On the other hand, Estes commented that the low educational level of rural parents is perpetuated in the educational level of the rural student. Moreover, he suggested that the lack of parental interest in classwork and the lack of available reading materials in the home also influence the less-than-favorable educational atmosphere in small rural communities (Estes 1967: 1-3).

Strengths of the Small School

Despite the multitudinous problems faced by rural educators, there are a host of strengths to be identified in the present-day small school. In his report to the National Conference of State Legislatures, Jonathan Sher stressed that

> Efforts to reform education in sparsely populated areas must capitalize upon the strengths, as well as correct the deficiencies, of rural schools . . . . Historically, reformers have either disparaged the advantages inherent in small rural community schools, or have taken them for granted (Sher 1978: 11).

James Jess found that community support in small schools is generally very high, as is student, parent and teacher satisfaction (Jess 1979: 3). Griessman emphasizes the status of the rural school as a community institution, much unlike its urban counterpart, and acknowledges that teacher-pupil ratios are usually relatively low (Griessman 1969: 13).

A parent-volunteer describes the secure feeling and personal satisfaction that students receive in small schools. "Individual help, individual concern, familiar faces, having more than one teacher know you, short transportation on a bus, security--all are important." Unlike those in many large schools, such students have opportunities for involvement in many activities. Besides being students, they can also be athletes, musicians, artists and public speakers (Skenes 1979: 593).

Roger Barker and Paul Gump also found evidence of wider participation in school activities by small school students than by large school students. Individual students were more likely to be attracted toward participation in the voluntary activities of their daily school environment (Barker 1964: 133-135). They also noted the higher proportion of settings per student in the small school, even though the large school provides a somewhat larger number and variety of activities. The consequences of this small school environment enable

(1) small school students to participate in a wider variety of extracurricular activities,

(2) a much larger portion of small school students to hold positions of importance and responsibility, and

(3) small school students to hold responsible positions in a wider variety of activities (Barker 1964: 92).

Obviously, the strengths and weaknesses of the small rural school are invariably interrelated. Any given characteristic may constitute a strength and, at the same time, constitute a weakness. Similarly, because of the heterogeneity of rural America, a strength in one school setting may be a weakness in another. As one assesses the problems, then, of contemporary rural education these factors must be weighed against each other.

PART III. RESPONSIVE STRATEGIES TOWARD AN IMPROVED DELIVERY SYSTEM: THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SMALL DISTRICTS

Clearly, from the preceding review of small district problems associated with the delivery of educational services, creativity and resourcefulness are at times the only means available for change. The lack of human and financial resources poses incomprehensible problems for educators in many rural and small school districts. Sher and Rosenfeld have defined the problems of small schools in terms of access and quality. They say rural children have lacked access to services and resources and that those available have "tended to be either inappropriate or simply inferior to those available in metropolitan areas" (Sher 1977: 51). Closely analogous to these problems has been the search for a sufficiently comprehensive curriculum.

The tendency has been to expand the curriculum and to offer increased educational opportunities to students through a greater diversity of course offerings. The typical school tries to address as many subjects relevant to student needs as possible. Yet, it is an established fact that small schools do not provide the comprehensive educational opportunities that are found in larger schools. Charles Benson and Jerry Barber are mindful that these districts are unable to provide a comprehensive curriculum, devote less attention to the disadvantaged and the handicapped, and provide only limited access to preschool and kindergarten programs. As a result, students with special needs in these schools tend to drop out of school earlier than their counterparts in urban schools (Benson 1974: 8).

Intermediate Units in the Delivery System

As educational costs, services and expectations have increased, small school districts have become less able to meet the demands for educational

services. They have responded to these demands in a variety of ways. One response has been the emergence of regional educational service agencies in many states. Although their organization and structure varies considerably from one state to another, these intermediate units have served a vital function in fostering inter-district cooperation. Although the concept did not gain widespread support until the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in the mid-1960's, 11 states had mandated the establishment of regional centers by 1977. Four others implemented legislation encouraging regional centers, four states passed legislation to strengthen multi-district county units, and four more states adopted legislation to foster cooperative services (Sher 1977: 64).

Among the services which intermediate units can provide directly to students, Lewis Tamblyn identifies special educational services and programs, vocational education programs, health and nutritional programs, transportation services, psychological services, special services and programs of cultural enrichment (Tamblyn 1971: 12). Regional education service centers may be the logical alternative to more reorganization and consolidation. Through effective planning, districts have found innumerable opportunities to serve their mutual needs. While one district establishes a comprehensive vocational facility, a neighboring district can establish a superior drama department and accommodate their students on a reciprocal basis (NFIRE 1974: 105).

The small rural district, severely limited in its ability to provide specialized services, may gain the services of "guidance counselors, educational diagnosticians, subject matter consultants, vocational-technical specialists, and others who are needed to satisfactorily address the

academic, social, and emotional requirements of children" through inter-district cooperative ventures (Benson 1974: 10).

For children with special needs, the services of a regional center may be the only means for obtaining these services. Gerald Kluempke sees the regional center as "the emerging concept . . . for taking care of the multiple needs of a widely scattered population in a cost-effective way." In small districts where the educational requirements of the majority take priority over the creation of special classes or the employment of teachers for handicapped students, the regional center can serve a useful function. Above all, benefits are not only provided by these services, but "one of the main benefits of receiving an education in a small rural school--close teacher-pupil relationships--remains intact" (NFIRE 1974: 10).

Horace Aubertine proposes that several small districts can join together to establish regional centers consisting of five or six teachers who are specialists in their respective fields. These teachers can travel from district to district, offering advanced instruction, present "special interest" programs, and even counsel teachers with each school setting aside time blocks in the schedule for such activity (Aubertine 1969: 592-593).

In Texas, 20 regional education service cnters were operationalized in 1967. First authorized as regional media centers by the Fifty-ninth Legislature in 1965, the role of these centers has expanded to include the delivery of many divergent services to local school districts (Myers 1977: 6-8). Among their services are the coordination of regional educational planning, consultative services, curriculum development, and cooperative special services delivery, wherever individual districts are not capable of providing such services on their own (Myers 1977: 79-81).

Cooperative Leadership for Curriculum Change

Curriculum leadership is one area in which these intermediate units can provide valuable assistance to local districts, since small schools do not usually have access to their own curriculum consultants. Personnel employed on a regional or cooperative basis can provide inservice sessions on new programs and teaching strategies, as well as assist individual teachers with specific problems. In Texas, curriculum specialists employed by the 20 regional education service centers participate in training sessions conducted by the Texas Education Agency and then return to their regions to conduct workshops for teachers at the local level. Among the consultants employed by these intermediate units are specialists in guidance and counseling, special education, vocational education, crime and drug prevention, media, planning and evaluation, career education, testing, and early childhood education (Benson 1974: 41-43).

John Uxer observes that "practically all activity of regional service centers ultimately impacts on instruction" and outlines a number of the instructional operations which should supplement rather than supplant local programs. One of these--a regionalized driver education program--would allow a number of school districts to share the necessary equipment, facilities and instructors. He suggests that other shared programs might include special education and vocational education services, guidance and testing programs, preschool and adult education programs; all of which might be prohibitive in cost for one small district to provide (NFIRE 1974: 126-128). It is incumbent upon small schools to initiate "sharing strategies if students are to have program options and achieve reasonable parity in opportunity with their peers in larger schools" says E. Robert

Stephens. They should look to the regional centers for the delivery of shared instructional programs in order to improve the scope and quality of their curricular offerings (Stephens 1979: 94).

Originally established to provide assistance to rural schools, these intermediate units have "probably been more active in the area of special education than in any other specific curricular field." They have assisted in the implementation of statewide programs for handicapped students and have helped local school districts in meeting the special needs of these students. The intermediate unit, due to the nature of its service boundaries, is able to employ specialists who may either conduct classes for the handicapped or serve in a training or consultative role for special education personnel employed at the local level (Benson 1974: 31-32).

Due to the high cost of equipment, material, and personnel for vocational education and the limited student population, intermediate units can also supplement or provide separate vocational education programs for small districts; thereby enabling a greater variety of specific vocational programs to be offered (Benson 1974: 38).

The Texas Legislature has recognized the need for shared services through cooperative agreements between small districts. In 1979, the Sixty-sixth Legislature enacted the following provision as part of Senate Bill 350:

> Each school district that has 1000 or fewer students in average daily attendance shall be allotted .6 personnel unit to be used cooperatively with other districts to provide suport services necessary to meet accreditation standards.

These support services are defined by State Board of Education policy to include "guidance services, visiting teacher services, health services,

learning resource center services, instructional leadership and supervisory/ technical services." The regional education service centers have been designated as management agents for these cooperatives (Texas Education Agency 1979: 17-19). Resulting from this provision, 582 Texas school districts now have access to the shared services of either instructional supervisors, counselors, librarians, technical assistants, nurses, nurse's aides, or librarian aides (Texas Education Agency 1980: 8).

Local Strategies for Successful Change

Among the strategies described by George Henderson for improving educational practices in small schools are "activities which allow students to proceed at their own pace; team teaching where two or three teachers with various specialties share classes, enabling students to have the benefits of many teaching skills; using teacher aides, which frees teachers from clerical tasks . . ." (Henderson 1971: 237-238).

Martha Loustaunau advises that the curriculum must "relate to the everyday lives and problems of the students, giving them instruction and information which they can apply to situations which they encounter." Among her proposals are

(1) development of text materials that relate to both rural and urban environments,

(2) establishment of summer programs that broaden cultural interests and aid in academic achievement,

(3) offering of courses that provide a stronger sense of rural identification and rural development, and

(4) use of community resources to strengthen vocational and career education programs.

Especially, by tapping the talents and skills of individuals in the community, support services are provided and, even more importantly,

the community senses a greater stake in the quality of the system (Loustaunau 1975: 7-15).

Faith Dunne also proposes that successful change in rural education must begin with the community as a resource. Such attempts to treat the community as a resource will cause the community to treat the school in the same manner. She says that community involvement in shaping and implementing a school's curriculum can offset two basic problems, limited personnel and course offerings, providing "a kind of variety rarely available in cities and suburbs . . . . Within even the small homogenous rural community there is a wide variety of skills, experiences, and memories" to be utilized (Dunne 1977: 114-116).

James Jess, superintendent of the CAL Community School District, a district of 305 students in rural Iowa belives that the success or failure of a school district is largely dependent upon the people in a community. He suggests the importance of finding out what the people want and then developing programs "around those wants," rather than telling them what they want. Among the procedures he describes are community surveys, school newsletters addressed to the community, and the use of various community advisory committees (Skenes 1979: 590-591).

The success of instructional programs in small schools "lies in the emphasis on individuals" according to A. W. Sturges. He identifies numerous ways in which small schools, through shared service programs, the addition of courses, flexible scheduling, close community-school relations, empathy for the learner, and maximum utilization of resources, have improved their instructional programs. Curricular offerings can be expanded through correspondence courses, multiple classes (more than one class taught by the same teacher in the same room), honors seminars by telephone, and

independent study. To improve the expertise of teachers, he suggests inter-district teachers' meetings where teachers who have developed a particular skill or expertise can assist their colleagues from neighboring districts. Finally, he encourages local administrators to turn small schools into "community learning centers," open to the patrons of the district, as a mechanism for creating community awareness and extending the district's programs to the entire community (A. W. Sturges 1974: 291-293).

In Waxahachie, Texas the schools not only serve as the center of community activity but also as the center for community education. While its student enrollment is larger than that of many rural districts, this community education program ought to serve as a model for other districts to emulate. The program serves 8,000 people in an average month and "the schools try to provide academic instruction in any subject someone in the community wants to learn." Further, almost 300 high school students attend night school programs for tutorial and enrichment purposes in the community education program (Thompson 1978: 37-38).

Improving Opportunities in Special Programs

For schools limited by isolation, size and other related factors, it has already been mentioned that the provision of special services, such as vocational and special education programs, is often difficult. Max Amberson offers the following considerations in providing vocational education opportunities:

(1) sharing vocational education services between schools,

(2) sharing vocational education teachers between schools,

(3) sharing vocational education counselors between schools,

(4) providing special financial inducements to schools for offering quality vocational education programs, and

(5) simulating vocational education programs, coordinated by general or vocational teachers, so that youth might develop competencies desirable and necessary for entry into occupations (Amberson 1968).

Jonathan Sher and Stuart Rosenfeld propose a balanced vocational-technical program, one that provides "urban" choices alongside programs that prepare rural youth for careers which are relevant to local needs. They cite the significance of establishing a functional program that is designed to develop marketable skills and focuses on regional manpower needs (Sher 1977: 59). Frank A. Fratoe expresses confidence in career education as a useful means for improving the work preparation of all rural/nonmetro Americans. He suggests broad school experiences through which students learn about work, including "basic academic study, awareness of work values, counseling, exploration of alternative occupations, work-study programs, job placement services, and vocational education" (Fratoe 1978: 34).

The continuation of "vocational agriculture" as the dominant component of the vocational curriculum can only be justified if it is sufficiently broadened to include career preparation for the wide range of jobs available in agribusiness. Griessman suggests that such a curriculum should include:

(1) mechanical skills applicable not only to tractors but also to automobiles;

(2) marketing techniques;

(3) home maintenance;

(4) basic electrical and carpentry techniques and concepts; and,

(5) human relations skills (Griessman 1969: 24).

In some high schools students participate in vocational programs for a half day and then return to their regular high school where they take academic subjects for the other half of the day. A unique program of cooperative vocational education, established in Jones County, Texas in 1976 has been described by Billy Walker and serves as a model for small or rural district vocational programs. This program evolved from a coordinated effort among five school districts following a survey of secondary students in the county which indicated that "lack of vocational training" was the major deficiency of their school curriculums. Existing programs had previously been limited to vocational agriculture and home-making courses.

A further needs assessment conducted in Fall, 1975 identified seven vocational course offerings as desirable: mechanics, vocational office education, general business, transportation trades, vocational nursing, cosmetology, and building trades. While none of the districts could produce sufficient student numbers adequate to support these vocational units on their own, it became obvious that many students would be deprived of vocational opportunities if some cooperative program was not established. Three new programs, including auto mechanics, building trades and vocational office education, were initiated during the first year, each in a different school district. Students are transported from each district to a central transportation point, where they change buses and proceed to the vocational program in which they are enrolled. The program, according to Walker,

is the only one of its kind in Texas and serves as "a model for delivery of vital occupational education to students in small, rural schools" (Walker 1979: 3-14).

In Meeker, Colorado, school officials were also concerned about their limited vocational education program and developed a "vocational exploration program," designed to expose students to diverse career opportunities. In this program "students work without pay but earn academic credit for training at the local hospital, with a veterinarian, with the forestry service, or with any one of 70 small businesses, or state agencies." The school custodian, responsible for the district's tape recorders, projectors, and other electronic equipment, even devotes one hour per day teaching secondary students about electronics (Thompson 1978: 37).

In many rural areas as much as a 200-mile radius may be necessary to find enough handicapped children to justify a special facility or program. Cooperative programs have effectively performed a function in this area but the major obstacle has been pupil transportation over long distances. Morvin A. Wirtz contends that a half hour is generally regarded as the maximum amount of time that a youngster should spend on a school bus. To overcome this concern, some districts have made the bus ride an extension of the classroom. In Philadelphia, for example, brain-injured children are transported 40 miles to a special facility while an assistant teacher rides along and teaches them to sing (Wirtz 1977: 58).

Other districts have transported the services to the students. In Macomb, Illinois, a mobile unit is used to bring a variety of early intervention services to preschool children. It serves as a home-based program for children under the age of three. The project is staffed by four child development specialists, with experience in both early childhood

and special education. And, while this is an early childhood program it does serve as an example of the strategies that might be used to serve elementary and secondary students in rural areas (Hutinger 1979: 2-3).

Burrello and Sage suggest the use of telecommunications to provide educational services to handicapped children in sparsely-populated areas through

(1) telephones installed in the child's home,

(2) the use of television for transmitting educational programs or to establish audio-communication directly between the classroom setting and the home, and

(3) provision of special administrative services (Burrello 1979: 143-145).

Again, due to their limited student population, small districts have been forced to address programs for gifted and talented students in innovative ways. One approach has been through the Talented Youth Seminars in Texas. Designed to offer intellectual stimulation and challenges for talented juniors and seniors the seminars are usually conducted on college campuses for students from area school districts. A total of eight such programs, serving approximately 75 school districts, are presently in operation. Five state-funded exemplary programs have also been established in Texas to provide programs for gifted and talented students in small, rural schools. Four of these are cooperative programs established through regional education service centers (Regions X, XII, XVI, and XIX) and one has been established in the Coahoma ISD. The Region X cooperative serves 30 small rural schools (Texas Education Agency 1980: 2-3).

The CAL school district, comprising three small Iowa communities, has initiated Project CARE (CAL Academic Resource Enrichment), characterized

by Robert Skenes and Carolyn Carlyle as a program for gifted and talented students that is open to everyone. "Independent study and minicourses are set up to explore in depth specific topics in language arts, social studies, science and math." The program, offered in addition to regular classes, exemplifies the personalized approach to learning, complete with parental involvement, that is possible in small districts (Skenes 1979: 591-592).

Improving the Quality of Teachers

Another issue directly related to improving the delivery of educational services in rural and small districts is the quality of these districts' teachers. Jonathan Sher advances four priorities for enhancing the human resources available to the rural district:

(1) the creation of training programs in colleges and graduate schools of education across the country to explicitly prepare teachers for service in rural schools;

(2) the expansion of inservice training (and other professional development activities) for rural teachers and administrators;

(3) an increase in the voluntary sharing of teachers, both among schools in the same district and between neighboring rural districts; and

(4) the creation of a "community faculty" to complement and extend the regular educational program in rural schools (Sher 1977: 287-289).

Ivan Muse notes that colleges offering extensive preparation programs which emphasize rural education have used a "field-centered approach," designed to place the preservice teacher in a rural setting for as much training and experience as possible. He identifies the following exemplary programs:

(1) Fifty-three Idaho school districts in cooperation with Idaho State University developed a program for the certification of longtime local residents. The course offerings in local communities evolved around actual public school experiences while others were provided by extension and correspondence.

(2) The University of New Mexico has given student teachers an opportunity to teach in two grade levels and in two socioeconomic communities, thereby providing experiences in rural and urban areas and in affluent and poverty situations.

(3) An educational consortium including Brigham Young University, local districts, a regional service center, and the Utah State Education Agency has been formed to provide a "field-based, competencies-centered approach" to teacher training in rural areas of Utah. Participating students live in the area assigned and complete a 15-week teaching assignment.

(4) Indiana University offers a program through which students can earn up to 18 hours of academic credit for student teaching and community internships. The internship, which usually precedes the student teaching experience, is a four-week, full-day internship in a community social agency.

(5) A Portland, Oregon program requires teacher trainees to conduct extensive case studies on selected pupils. The program "emphasizes the need for rural teachers to possess a much broader background in counseling and guidance than that of urban teachers, especially in career guidance" (Muse 1977: 30-35).

Horace Aubertine recognizes an acute need to bring rural education into a balanced relationship with its urban counterpart and suggests that

teacher quality is critical for achieving this goal. The solution, he proffered, lies largely in the imaginative and efficient use of funds that are available for rural educational improvement. But, he also suggests that the creation of a pool of trained teachers aware of the unique problems and needs of rural communities is essential to any positive movement toward improvements in rural education (Aubertine 1969: 594).

Opportunities for Innovations and Improvements in the Delivery System

Although some writers suggest that the small school can be used effectively as a laboratory for change and innumerable examples of successful innovations can be corroborated, William Boyd and Glenn Immegart have concluded that educational innovation is substantially constrained in rural communities. Rather, rural schools are used normally as mechanisms for community cohesion and continuity. Three primary characteristics of rural communities which contribute to this phenomenon are (1) their isolation, (2) their traditional and localized values, and (3) their severe shortage of resources. These factors commonly cause rural educators to demonstrate reluctance toward change and innovation (Boyd 1977: 52-53).

Eugene Griessman also notes that effective forces for change in the rural sector are limited. Teacher training programs and curricula consistently reflect older and narrower approaches, existing funding legislation tends to restrict innovation and the rural population is known to be conservative (Griessman 1969: 26).

The Western States Small Schools Project has identified four requirements that are essential for successful change to occur in small districts:

(1) gaining commitment to the new set of goals,

(2) producing environmental conditions and mobilizing the resources necessary for attainment of the new goals,

(3) changing the value system and retraining the staff, and

(4) integrating the change with all other units of the system (Stutz 1967: 199).

The innovations that are necessary to effect positive improvements in small schools, declares Rowen C. Stutz, are not limited to minor adjustments in teaching procedures. He invites rural educators to initiate an almost completely new instructional design, including new ways of organizing for instruction; new building designs; refinement of instructional procedures appropriate for small groups; new staffing patterns, such as shared staff, staff by telephone and videotape; new training programs for teachers; and imaginative utilization of instructional resources (Stutz 1967: 197-198).

Jonathan Sher suggests five priorities as being necessary to overcome the historically haphazard curriculum design in rural schools. These strategies for revitalizing the curriculum in rural schools are:

(1) Development of competently designed curricula that are appropriate to the communities in which they will be utilized.

(2) Establishment of a curriculum that reflects and enhances the natural advantages of rural communities.

(3) Implementation of a curriculum that gives rural children a sense of options for their adult lives.

(4) Incorporation of firm, but fair, performance standards into the overall rural curriculum.

(5) Creation of a network of individuals, agencies, and organizations committed to the improvement of rural curricula and curricular materials.

He further suggests a return to individualized instruction and cross-age teaching, extensive use of the local community as a learning

resource, and use of the community environment as a basis for curricular materials in such programs as outdoor education, science, survival skills, and physical education (Sher 1977a: 285-286).

Rural educators throughout the country, according to Cheryl Chase, agree that providing for continuous curriculum improvement depends on four critical conditions:

(1) A knowledgeable and well-trained staff;

(2) A knowledge of successful programs, materials, and practices in rural education;

(3) The ability to utilize existing resources more effectively; and

(4) The ability to cooperatively support curriculum improvement activities which require more resources than any one small rural school district could provide (Chase 1978: 6-7).

As small schools search for strategies to enhance the quality of their curricular offerings, Everett Edington suggests five major characteristics of such schools that must be taken into account. These include their organizational patterns, financial considerations, the professional staff, socio-cultural and classroom management characteristics (Edington 1976: 10-21). Edington notes that the informal atmosphere, relative freedom from administrative bureaucracy, the potential for flexibility and the relative ease with which an innovative curriculum may be implemented are all conducive to positive change (Edington 1976: 11).

The prominent personal identity of professional educators in small rural communities is another attribute which Edington characterizes as a positive tool for curriculum change. The rural educator is usually highly respected by the community and, as a result, has much greater opportunity than his urban counterpart to assume leadership and power in the community (Edington 1976: 18).

Conclusion

Within the existing framework of public education in rural and small schools, educational leaders must always seek new ways for achieving substantive improvements in the delivery of educational services to their students. Although much of the official concern for rural education and small schools has been directed, in the past, toward consolidation and urbanization, these schools have shown their adeptness for identifying and implementing promising alternatives for rural school improvement. These efforts have occurred through state policy formulation, inter-district cooperation and effective local education leadership. The voluntary sharing of services, staff and equipment has demonstrated enormous potential, and the utilization of modern technologies offers promising prospects for further development. Although the problems may be numerous and, sometimes, difficult to overcome, the opportunities for quality education in rural and small schools can be found in local resourcefulness, creativity, external assistance, cooperation and a willingness to provide the best possible educational program.

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